MY LIFE IN VANA'DIEL

A MONTHLY TRAVELOGUE OF ONE EDITOR'S TIME IN FINAL FANTASY XI

MILKMAN

RED MAGE

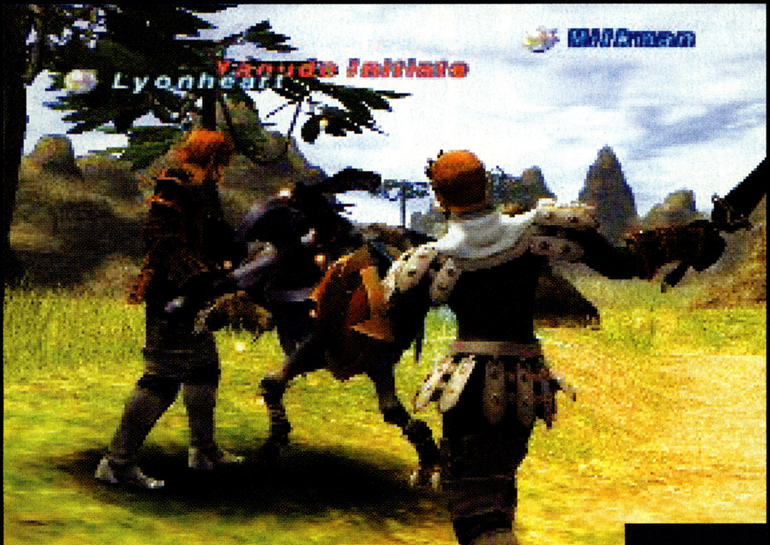
MAIN JOB LEVEL: **13**
SUBJOB LEVEL: **0**
NATION: **WINDURST**
RACE: **HUME**
SERVER: **SIREN**

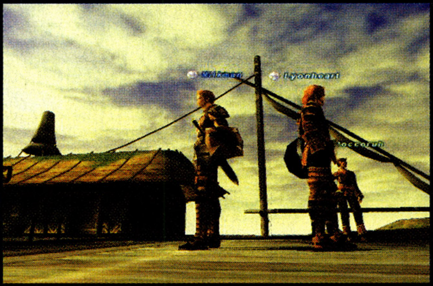
With *Final Fantasy XI* less than a couple months old, it seems like the time is ripe to document my progression through the game, giving our readers a month-by-month taste of what it's like to make your way through Square Enix's massively multiplayer online RPG in neo-quasi real time.

Of the three different nations you can choose as your base of operations, I picked the tarutaru-populated nation of Windurst as my home. It's a place of quiet serenity, bracketed on all sides by babbling brooks and leafy vegetation. As I learned during the original beta-test period, the first thing you really want to do is go outside the safety of the city gates and get yourself some experience. If you talk to a guard with the designation "W.W." at any of the gates leading outside the city, he'll cast "signet" on you, which will allow you to collect various crystals from creatures you've killed. These are good for using in crafts or for selling at the auction house. The economic system in *FFXI*, while requiring significant effort, is one of the most impressive elements of the game. You can create quite a cottage industry for yourself if you specialize in a skill that can help other players in their travels, earning you that all-important gil (cash) that will help you buy better armor and weapons for yourself.

Early on, while attempting to complete some of the game's early missions, Ihappened upon another solo traveler named Lyonheart. Since that day, we've been an inseparable duo, tackling the game's missions and quests together, while gaining levels much faster than if we'd been playing solo. We eventually invested in a Linkshell (*FFXI*'s most powerful communication tool) and have since added a horde of allies to our group. Check back next month to see if I've managed to reach level 18 and procure a subjob. ⏮

_ James Mielke





→ If you learn anything playing *Final Fantasy XI*, it's that you don't get very far playing solo. Wandering out into unknown territory by yourself is almost a guaranteed one-way ticket back home. You don't lose any items or money, but the game takes a hefty chunk of experience out of your back pocket, and that's worse than anything.

Milkman
Lyonheart

Milkman
Lyonheart

MY LIFE IN VANA'DIEL

A MONTHLY TRAVELOGUE OF ONE EDITOR'S TIME IN FINAL FANTASY XI

MILKMAN

RED MAGE/WHITE MAGE

MAIN JOB LEVEL: **21**
SUBJOB LEVEL: **8**
NATION: **WINDURST**
RACE: **HUME**
SERVER: **SIREN**
LINKSHELL: **ROUNDABOUTS**

→ As plenty of Siren-bound *FFXI*-playing *GMR* readers discovered this month, that really is Milky running around.

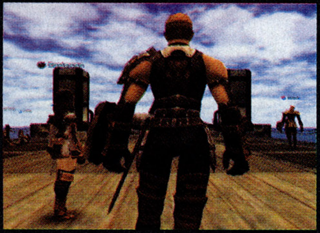
I'm back, and, after (according to the game clock) nine actual days of playtime, I have the results to show for it. Playing *FFXI* this month has been a period of frustration and joy. The joy: Not only did I achieve what I set out to do last month, which was to acquire my subjob, but I also got my main job up to level 20 and secured my chocobo license, which made traveling about three times faster now that I don't have to run everywhere on foot. It is possibly the single most liberating thing in the game thus far.

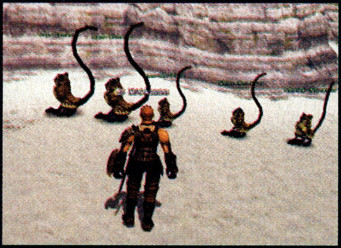
The frustrations came in attempting to collect the parts I needed for my subjob. Since I decided to take the easier of the two quests required to qualify for a subjob, I needed to find a damselfly worm, a crab apron, and a magicked skull. The first two items were relatively simple to get, as the creatures that carry them are readily available. You just kill them until they randomly cough up what you need. The magicked skull, however, is only found on a monster known as a ghoul. It's not bad enough that ghouls are tough enemies, the real problem lies in the fact that they only show up between the hours of 22:00 and 4:00 (by the in-game clock). This translates into about 10 real-world minutes of game time. And since ghouls only appear sporadically, you can almost see why it took me four human days to get a freakin' skull (I finally got mine on January 1, 2004).

Perhaps if I wasn't being so democratic, letting all my friends cast lots (*FFXI*'s in-game lottery system for divvying up items), I might have gotten one sooner, but oh well. Be warned that playing this game requires extreme amounts of time and devotion in order to achieve your in-game goals. Time I got.

Other amusements this month were the New Year's monkey family that could be found walking all over Vana'diel, who, if offered the appropriate gifts, would give you a present in return. The presents were mostly lousy, though, so good riddance to those damn apes. Roaming treants were also found (and slaughtered), and I got eaten by a saber-toothed tiger. Pop in next month to see if I've gotten to level 30 (yeah, right!).

_ James Mielke





→ There are two ways to get in on Milkman's Linkshell group, the **Roundabouts**, and neither of them is to ask Milky himself. Instead, do a search for either of his two partners in crime—Lyonheart or Onidragon—and talk to one of them. If you're cool, you might get in on one of Siren's hippest Linkshells, and you might make some new friends as well.

Milkman
Orcish Grunt
Maeve

Columnarius

MY LIFE IN VANA'DIEL

A MONTHLY TRAVELOGUE OF ONE EDITOR'S TIME IN FINAL FANTASY XI

Milkman
Wraeth

Milkman
Lyonheart

← Meet Milkman's four other characters: Gyogi, Sade, Lychee and Gatecrasher. You never know which one you'll see!

Lychee

Gatecrasher

Gatecrasher

Gyogi

Sade

OK, so I didn't *quite* get to level 30 this month like I planned, but there's a good reason for it. After I spent a couple days in Quifim stampeding up to level 25, I decided to take a break from my stupendous progress and raise my thief up to level 15 (so that her treasure hunter skill would kick in and help finance my expensive red mage).

That's right, I have a second character, and what's more, I actually have five. Why? To get as much of a taste as possible of what the other character classes, races, and nations feel like to play with/as/in. The pitfall in raising so many characters is the jack-of-all-trades syndrome. Time spent leveling one character is time spent away from leveling my main dude, **Milkman**, so because of that, if I devote any time bringing anyone up to speed, it'll be with **Gyogi** (Japanese for "behavior"), my most excellent mithra thief. My goal with Gyogi is to make her a bad-ass ranger, although she eventually will grow to be a high-powered samurai/ranger combo. Nothing looks cooler than a medium-sized cat chick walking around in pimped-out samurai gear. You know this to be true.

Ever since this column first hit streets a couple months back, I've been besieged by messages from well-wishers and *GMR* readers alike. And that's only from the people on Siren. I can't imagine what it would be like logging on if players from all servers could send me "tells." But it's cool. I knew what I was getting into when I printed my character info in the mag, so here's a big HOLLA to everyone who's said hello. It's great to hear from you all and I welcome your messages.

That said, I'm going to crank out a few shout-outs, starting with **Bluefirewnx** of the **Warrior Nation Network**, whose enthusiastic members were instructed to say "Yo!" to me whenever they logged on. The ever-present and helpful **Kaiseran** (level 54 at press time) also deserves a mention, as does **Wraeth**, an EB manager based somewhere in the wild, bear-filled country called "Canada." Happy hunting to you all, and next month level 30 is *mine*. Believe it!

_ **James Mielke**

MILKMAN

RED MAGE/WHITE MAGE

MAIN JOB LEVEL: 25
SUBJOB LEVEL: 12
NATION: WINDURST
RACE: HUME
SERVER: SIREN
LINKSHELL: ROUNDABOUTS

XB
PC
PS2
GBA
GC

MY LIFE IN VANA'DIEL

A MONTHLY TRAVELOGUE OF ONE EDITOR'S TIME IN FINAL FANTASY XI

MILKMAN

DRAGOON/RANGER
MAIN JOB LEVEL: **15**
SUB JOB LEVEL: **8**
NATION: **WINDURST**
RACE: **HUME**
SERVER: **SIREN**
LINKSHELL: **ROUNDABOUTS**

This month, I was definitely on fire. With the help of some friends (Wraeth, Lyonheart, Bluescorpion, Onidragon), I managed to complete the Three Kingdoms quest, defeat a cranky dragon, and achieve rank 3, which grants me access to more rewarding quests and more exotic conquest items.

Also, I did reach level 30, thanks to a productive run in the jungles outside of Kazham, but that achievement alone doesn't tell the entire story. In order to merely get to Kazham, I had to get three keys. Luckily, I had Wraeth around to help me. She basically led me around Vana'Diel to all the locations where creatures drop keys to Kazham. It took a little while, but we were done in a few hours. Talk about a guided tour!

I also got—in quantity, I might add—some advanced jobs. The first advanced job I secured was that of a summoner. It took a lot of running around, trying to expose my carbuncle ruby to the proper weather conditions required, to finish the quest, but it was relatively easy overall. The second advanced job I snared was that of a samurai. This one was less with the running around (although getting to Norg, where the SAM quest begins, isn't exactly easy), and more with the quick completion, due to Wraeth and a high-level dark knight named Drakul. Thanks, Drak!

My third advanced job, and the one I'm devoting the most time to, is dragoon. This one involved a *lot* of running back and forth and is way tedious until the point where you fight a dragon to finish the quest. Wraeth and I actually did this quest together and have been leveling our dragoon jobs (and wyverns Sasavi and Qiqiru) simultaneously. Dragoons are so awesome; put a pair of dragoons and their pet wyverns together, and it's like landing four attacks at once on whatever hapless enemies you're fighting. Plus, the jump attack you earn at level 10 is fantastic.

The last advanced job I completed as of press time was for Paladin, which I did simply because I was already helping Lyonheart get his (he's now a PAL/WAR). But my thanks go out to Wraeth, my constant companion since we met last month. Without her, I wouldn't be half the character I am today.

_James Mielke

Milkman
CarbCarbuncle

Carbuncle get!

The rainbow connection

→ Whenever a summoner is born, they say that a rainbow appears in the sky to mark the occasion. Well, that's the Milkman's rainbow (above), and yes, he is now a summoner.

Milkman
Lyonheart
Shrieker
Wraeth
Jolly

Wraeth
Milkman
Carbuncle
Carbuncle

MY LIFE IN VANA'DIEL

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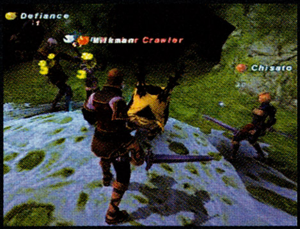
Giant Hunter
Milkman

Mithrandir
Kaiseran
Milkman
Barlog
WRAETH... WILL YOU MARRY ME?

Wraeth
Milkman
Rathsly



→ At level 38 red mages gain the ability to Raise the fallen. Ironically, Wraeth (right) was the first player Milky had to raise. Top right, Kaiseran stares down a twin white mage, before helping Milky achieve Rank 4.

Check back next month to see if Wraeth says yes!

You could say that a red mage isn't truly a red mage until he hits level 41. This is when all the skills intrinsic to being a red mage come to fruition. While one major step comes at level 38 (acquiring the ability to cast Raise on KO'ed players) and another at level 40 with Convert, which allows red mages to swap their current HP with their MP, it's not until level 41 that red mages become the life of the party, gaining the unique ability to cast Refresh on both themselves and others.

Refresh regenerates MP without requiring the player to crouch and rest, thereby eliminating downtime for parties, as white mages can continue healing the warriors, and black mages can continue casting offensive magic on enemies. Less downtime equals faster battles, which equals more experience points and higher levels. Any successful high-level party has a red mage in its ranks, and ideally a bard as well.

Well, I am now officially a candidate for life of the party as I catapulted past the 41 mark over a furious weeklong campaign in the Crawler's Nest and Gustav Tunnel with a blend of awesome American (Purger, Rathsly, Alderon) and Japanese (Kimkaphwan, Hiqqoo, and Deedlid, among the many) players. I also gained the advanced jobs of ranger, bard, and beastmaster, while bringing my ranger up to level 10 (many thanks to Damaramu for hooking me up with some nice ranger-specific bows—especially that Power Bow +1!).

When I wasn't leveling my red mage, Wraeth and I were leveling up our dragoons in the Valkurm Dunes. I also spent a great deal of time running around assembling a full set of race-specific equipment, a laborious quest that takes you to dangerous dungeons all over Vana'Diel to gain this valuable midlevel gear. Another thing players start collecting after level 40 is their artifact gear. These job-specific items can be obtained only every handful of levels, and my first one was a sword called a Fencing Degen that, with the help of a level 70-plus dragoon named Solcloud, was easily obtained.

Again, none of this would have been possible without my good luck charm, Wraeth. Ever present and always willing to share in my adventures, I can think of no one I'd rather embark on *FFXI*'s newly added wedding quest with. So, how 'bout it, Wraeth? Will you...marry me? ⏮

_James Mielke

→ Editor's note: Kids, the above in-game marriage proposal is a game-context simulation performed by trained stunt-gamers. Don't try this at home. Or do. It's part of the game.

MILKMAN

RED MAGE/DRAGOON

MAIN JOB LEVEL: **48**
SUBJOB LEVEL: **20**
NATION: **WINDURST**
RACE: **HUME**
SERVER: **SIREN**
LINKSHELL: **ROUNDABOUTS**

Alderon, you're such a n00b.

MY LIFE IN VANA'DIEL

A MONTHLY TRAVELOGUE OF ONE EDITOR'S TIME IN FINAL FANTASY XI

MILKMAN

Wraeth
Milkman

RED MAGE/WHITE MAGE

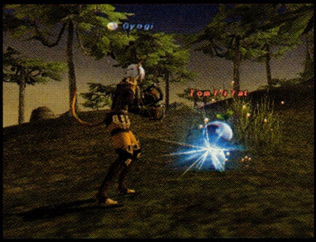
MAIN JOB LEVEL:	55
SUBJOB LEVEL:	25
NATION:	WINDURST
RACE:	HUME
SERVER:	SIREN
LINKSHELL:	ROUNDABOUTS

She said "YES"—although nearly too late to make it into this issue, but in time it was, so let the planning begin (that's your job, Alderon)! In case you missed it last issue, I made an in-column "marriage" proposal to longtime partner-in-crime Wraeth to coincide with *FFXI*'s upcoming wedding services for deeply devoted characters. We're planning on having the service in my home nation of Windurst (surprisingly, Wraeth chose Windy, even though she's Sandorian in origin) at an undisclosed location.

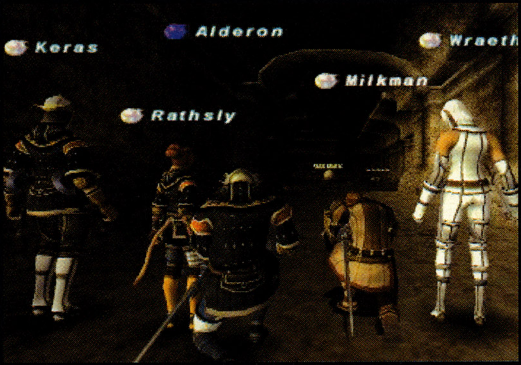
Wedding planning aside (we haven't set a date), this was yet another month of rapid ascension in many areas. Among the month's accomplishments were getting rank 5 (and the ability to ride airships between the three nations and Jeuno), obtaining a couple more pieces of my RDM Artifact Gear (namely, my warlock boots and warlock gloves), and completing the level 50 limit-break quest. The limit-break quest is a mandatory event you must complete to be allowed to rise in level, every five levels after 50. The 50 LB, in particular, requires you to collect three items: bomb ash, exoray mold, and ancient papyrus. While the first two items are "easy" enough to get, provided you have an able-bodied party, it's the papyrus that puts you in the deepest corners of the Eldieme Necropolis, a place deadly for even level 75 players. It took my party days to get the papyrus, but once we did, we became a limit-break machine, acquiring items for a number of our party people, like Keras, Flannelman, Lenneth, Roelon, and Raknor.

I also brought my Mithra thief, Gyogi, up to level 18, and with the help of Rathsly, obtained all the subjob items in record time. I added Monk to Gyogi's abilities and am now a butt-kicking, gil-farming fiend in the nation of Windurst.

This month saw a flood of new players join *FFXI* since the PS2 version hit. The Roundabouts linkshell has grown significantly, with core members like Plusbee leveling the fastest. Interestingly, the 'shell has adopted a fair number of higher-level veterans from far and wide, making a rock-solid experience-party little more than a *"Hello, Roundabouts!"* away. It's a great group of players, and it's been awesome watching the shell grow. But now we'd like to hear from you. If you like this column (or not), please don't just send me tells about it. Write **gmr@ziffdavis.com** and tell us your thoughts! **_James Mielke**

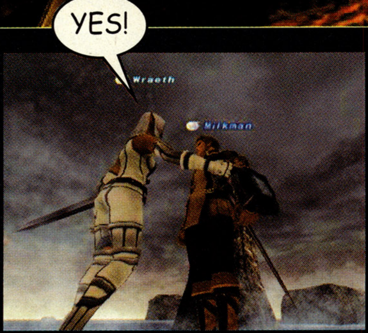


→ "Gimme your Fruit Punches!" hollers alter-ego **Gyogi** as she puts a whuppin' on the NM, **Tom Tit Tat**. Below, the pride and joy of the **Roundabouts** take a break in the Quicksand Caves.



Dark Dragon
35
Milkman
Sa Qiqiru
Wraeth

Faustis
Milkman
Wraeth
Lyonheart



→ Oddly enough, *GMR* managing editor Carrie "Soap Opera" Shepherd was more eager to hear Wraeth's answer than anyone else. Well, Carrie, the answer is "yes." You can break out the Kleenex now.

MY LIFE IN VANA'DIEL

A MONTHLY TRAVELOGUE OF ONE EDITOR'S TIME IN FINAL FANTASY XI

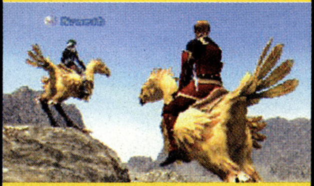
The highlight of the month—and quite possibly my entire time playing *FFXI*—was moving up to Rank 6, an arduous task that first sent our rock-steady team of Roundabouts (composed of Wraeth, Flannelman, Lenneth, Roelon, and our high-level paladin buddy, Jetteseraph) deep into Fei'Yin to do battle with the Archlich Taber'quoan and his skeletal minions. But by putting our paladin Roelon out to provoke the Archlich, the mages and rangers bombed the lights out of the 'lich while we sent our DRK Flannelman off to freelance the roving skeletons with Spinning Scythe. Result? We put the Archlich back in the ground, and mission 5-1 was complete.

The second, and most difficult, part of the mission was taking down the giant Shadowlord himself (this half of the mission was originally the final plot element of the game prior to the *Zilart* expansion). His first form takes planning. When we finally reached his chamber after a long and arduous trek through the Castle Zvahl Bailey area, we encountered his first form. Around halfway through his life bar, SL became nearly impervious to melee attacks. At this point, we put our Black Mage, Lenneth, on Manafont duty, which let her cast high-level black magic at no MP cost for a limited time. Shadowlord's first form: owned.

The second form proved a more distinct challenge. The strategy was for me to use Divine Seal and then Curaga to heal the party, but I was out of MP, which forced me to try to Convert and fill my MP bar. Instead, I was instantly KO'd, as SL chose that moment to unleash his area-of-effect Implode move, which subsequently led to the demise of five-sixths of our team. Wraeth went down, then Lenneth. Our burly men, Roelon and Flannelman, held out a little longer, but they soon were buckled by SL's relentless use of Implode. But somehow—and this is where it gets good—Jetteseraph had just enough MP to heal himself and enough Hi-Elixir healing potions (he was down to 1HP at one point) to weather SL's storm. It was stressful, watching SL pound away at Jette mercilessly, especially since we couldn't see the boss' life bar. The fight probably lasted around five minutes, but it was the longest five minutes of my *FFXI* career. But just when we thought it was all over, Jette landed the killing blow on the Shadowlord, and we who were fallen rose once again, victorious —richer for the experience, and Rank 6 besides.

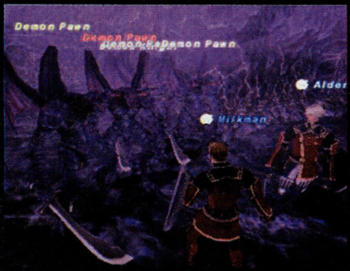
_James Mielke

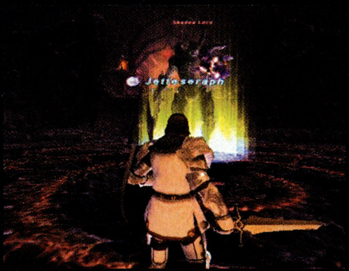
MILKMAN

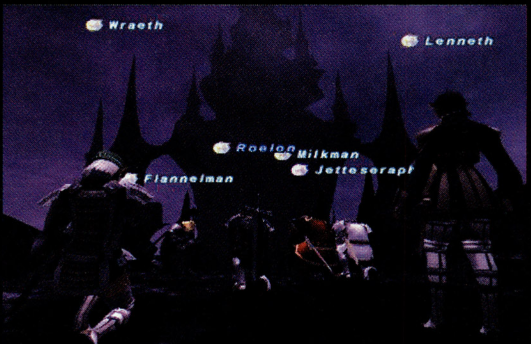


RED MAGE/BARD

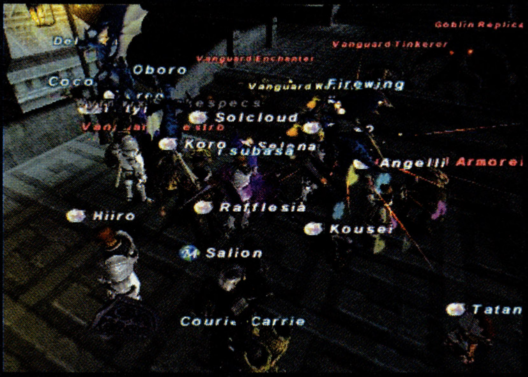
MAIN JOB LEVEL: **57**
SUBJOB LEVEL: **17**
NATION: **WINDURST**
RACE: **HUME**
SERVER: **SIREN**
LINKSHELL: **ROUNDABOUTS**

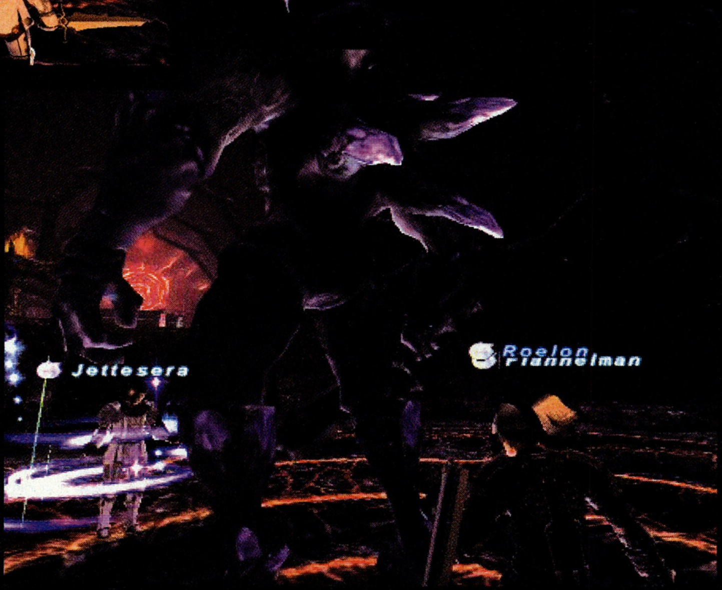

Demon Pawn
Demon Pawn
Demon Knight
Demon Pawn
Alder
Milkman


Shadow Lord
Jetteseraph


Wraeth
Lenneth
Roelon
Milkman
Jetteseraph
Flannelman

→ Milky and the soon-to-be-whacked **Alderon** (above, left) stare down an eruption of demons in **Castle Zvahl Keep**, while **Lenneth** and crew (top, right) mentally prepare for the showdown with the Shadowlord. Below, a chaotic scene in the depths of **Dynamis**, an area that humbles even high-level adventurers. Able-bodied friend **Solcloud** (DRG/75) and his party put their best foot forward.


Goblin Replica
Vanguard Tinkerer
Vanguard Enchanter
Oboro
Firewing
Coco
Solcloud
Koro
Selena
Angelli
Armorer
Hiiro
Rafflesia
Kousei
Salion
Tatan
Carrie


Jettesera
Roelon
Flannelman

When I grow up, I want to be just like Jetteseraph.

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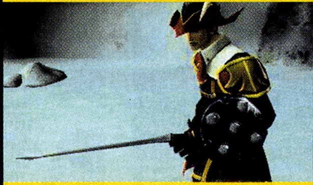
MILKMAN



RED MAGE/BARD

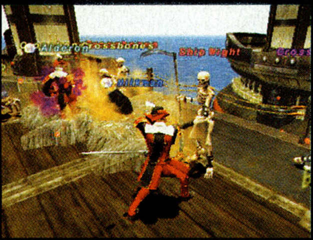
MAIN JOB LEVEL: **60**
SUBJOB LEVEL: **30**
NATION: **WINDURST**
RACE: **HUME**
SERVER: **SIREN**
LINKSHELL: **ROUNDABOUTS**

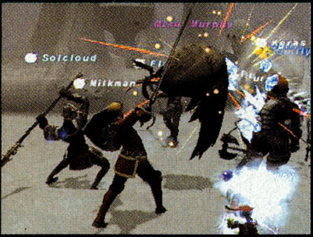
The word is "sixty," and that's the level I hit this month. A grand level it is, one that takes a lot of work since each step up the level 55-60 ladder is 20,000 experience points deep. But reaching 60 has allowed me to equip the final bastion of a Red Mage's Artifact Gear, called the Warlock's Chapeau. With the help of various Roundabouts, my level 75 buddy Solcloud, other assorted high-level players like Sydious (a tarutaru Dark Knight), and a melee-heavy three-party alliance, we were able to kill the required Nightmare Monsters (big bogy Miser Murphy in Fei'Yin and the hard-hitting Guardian Statue in Garlaige Citadel), and obtain the items required to earn the hat.

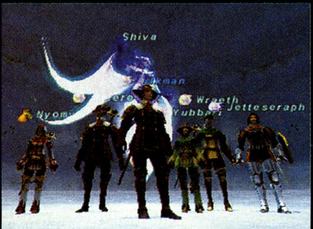
A quick return trip to N. Sandoria triggered a bone-chilling cutscene that, to be perfectly frank, made me proud to be a Red Mage. I'm sure every job has its equivalent cutscene, but without spoiling anything, the cinema for Red Mages makes you feel like a special-forces agent in the world of magic users. Sure, Black Mages do a great job nuking stuff, and White Mages keep you alive, but when you need to pull out the big guns for the most dangerous assignments, nothing solos as well as a Red Mage.

I can't tell you how exciting it is to be a high-level RDM (buffed with Phalanx, Blink, Stoneskin, and Protect III) confronted by uber-tough enemies (like Bloodtear) hitting me for zero damage. Or unleashing area-of-effect attack spells (perhaps Firaga if I'm subbing BLM) to decimate dozen of weaker enemies in one or two shots is so much fun, I'm glad I chose to become a member of the RDM Corps. Besides, an RDM fully outfitted in a complete set of Artifact Gear looks absolutely pimp. RDMs can heal, use powerful black magic, raise the dead, restore other mage's MP, provide excellent team support, and they can wear heavier armor than other mages, and use both shields and swords. Simply put: RDMs are the red Jedi of *FFXI*.

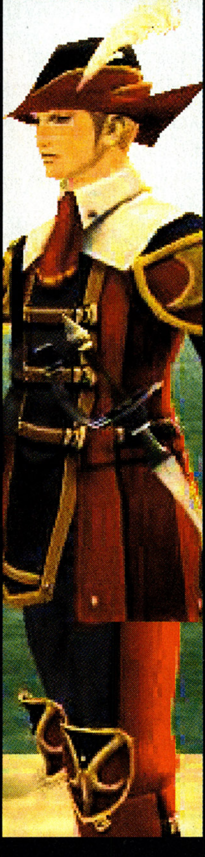
Of course, leveling up by fighting the same damn crabs and beetles for 40 levels is getting pretty old, which makes me long for the *Chains of Promathia* expansion more than ever. In the meanwhile, planning is going full-steam ahead for my impending marriage to in-game partner, Wraeth, at an undisclosed location and date. The paparazzi lurk, and only a small handful of friends and Roundabouts will be able to attend. So, stay tuned for more. **_James Mielke**

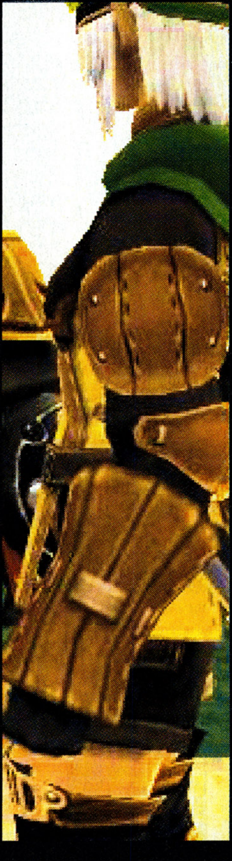


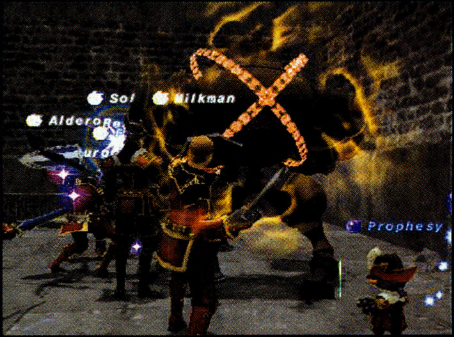




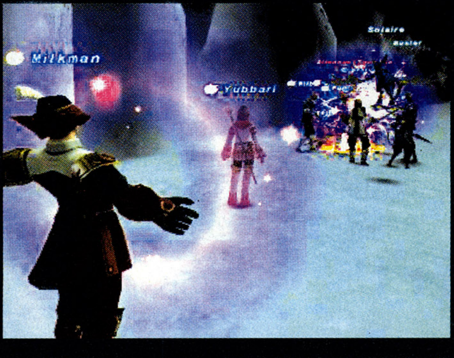
→ It's been an action-packed month for Milky. Above, Milkman and Alderon save a Mhaura-bound ship full of newbies from the wrath of a Pirate invasion. Solcloud and 16 others (middle) help Milky get his RDM AF hat. Then, Milkman and company successfully defeat Shiva in an Avatar Prime summoner battle (above-bottom).







→ The Guardian Statue (above) who holds the final key—a nail puller—toward earning the Warlock's Chapeau, has an area of effect attack that can crush your whole party if you're not prepared. Below, Milky helps out a host of White Mages (including Roundabout, Nyomy) battling for their own Artifact body armor, the Healer's Briault, in the depths of Fei'Yin, a dangerous area filled with high-level ghosts and undead.



The few. The proud. The Roundabouts.

MY LIFE IN VANA'DIEL

A MONTHLY TRAVELOGUE OF ONE EDITOR'S TIME IN FINAL FANTASY XI

MILKMAN

RED MAGE/BARD

MAIN JOB LEVEL: **62**
SUBJOB LEVEL: **31**
NATION: **WINDURST**
RACE: **HUME**
SERVER: **SIREN**
LINKSHELL: **ROUNDABOUTS**

The date was July 31, 2004. The event took place at 2 p.m. at a secret cliffside location in East Sarutabaruta (in Windurst), inaccessible by normal means and free from prying eyes. The persons in attendance were there by discreet invite only. In Windurst time it was early evening, the stars were out, a cool breeze was whistling through the trees, and the sound of the crashing waves below barely reached our ears. The occasion: the long-awaited wedding of Wraeth and the Milkman.

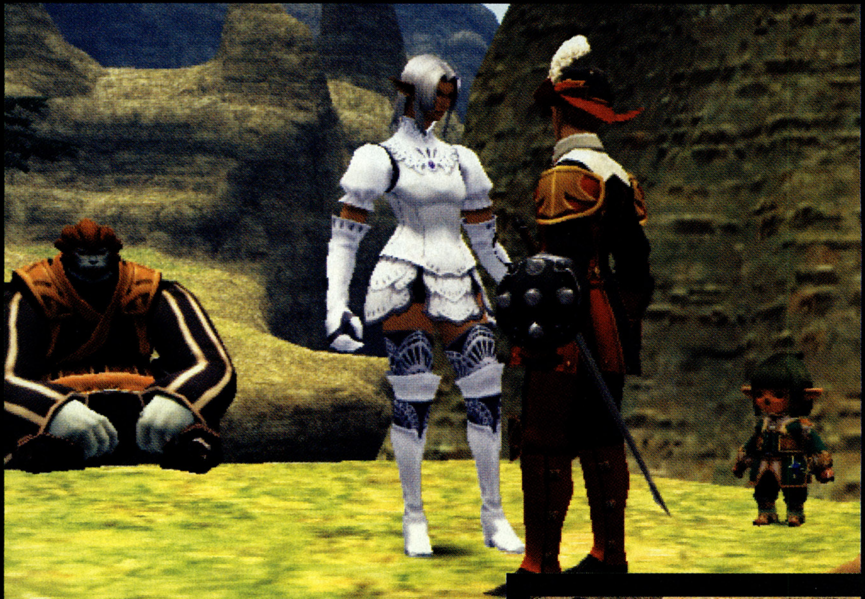
Milkman says, "The day I met Wraeth I was running through Port Windurst going God knows where. She poked me as I ran past, so I stopped to talk to her and she was very sweet. Over the next few days she would send me a tell to see what I was up to, and I just so happened to be looking for my keys to Kazham. She helped me that day and every day thereafter. We've been inseparable since. She actually put her own advanced progress on hold so I could catch up to her, so that we could party together. The Roundabouts have grown tremendously since Lyonheart and I started the 'shell, and many players have come and gone, but there has always been one constant by my side. That person is Wraeth."

Wraeth says, "There's comfort in knowing that no matter which side of the world he's on and regardless of what he's doing, Milk would abandon it in an instant to tank a pack of throat-jabbing tonberries chasing me across the jungle. He's my ever-present companion and relentless savior."

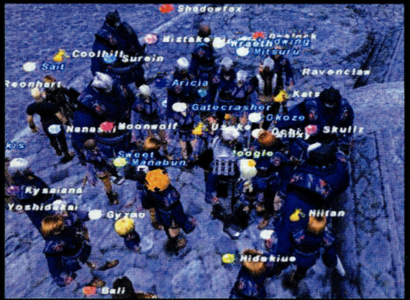
And so on this day the wedding chimes rang, the Summerfest fireworks blossomed in the night sky, and Suzulolo the Wedding Master uttered the lines: "The stars are out shining; the night is quite clear. We ask that the lovely bride kindly draw near." That was the cue. First, the Milkman walked to the tree by which Suzulolo stood, and Wraeth followed shortly after, accompanied by their chaperone, Greenthumb. The guests had parted to either side, forming a natural aisle for couple. As the ceremony continued, the pair exchanged the ceremonial food items (Windurstian tradition) and consumed them. Rings were then given and placed upon each other's left hand. Eventually, as Suzulolo made the final inquiry, "Are you certain in this undertaking?" Wraeth and Milkman responded simultaneously, "Yes, we are," and were made husband and wife. Thanks to all for a joyous day in an adventure that has only just begun. _James Mielke

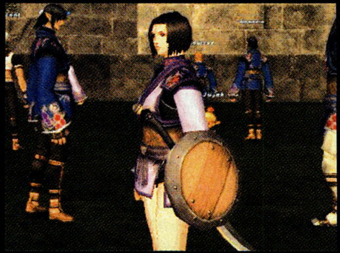
Garuda Prime
Jetteseraph
Wraeth
Flannelman

Milkman
Wraeth



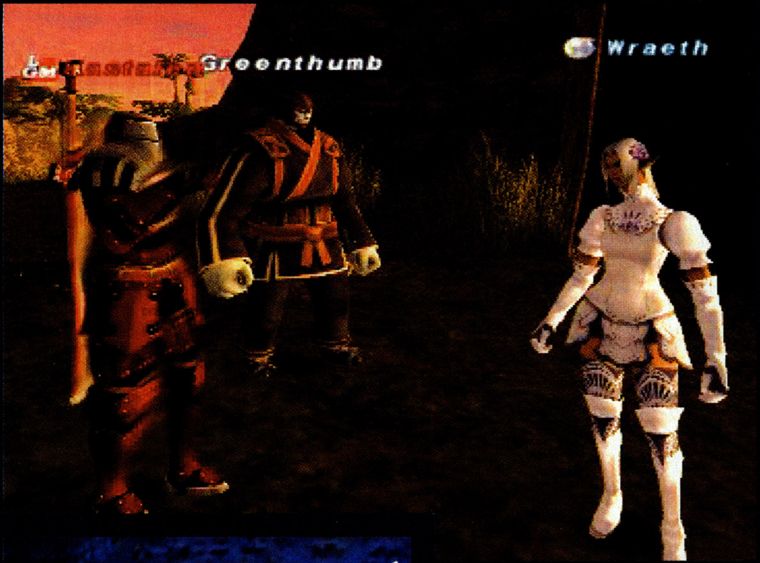
"I do. Our destinies are bound."

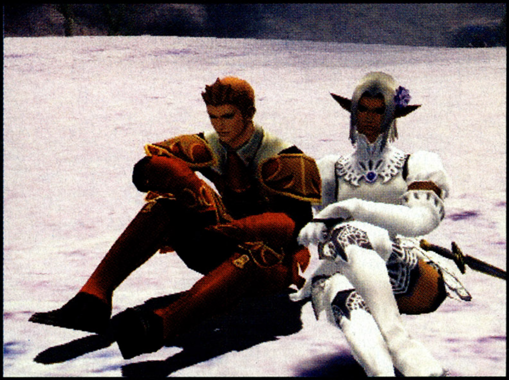




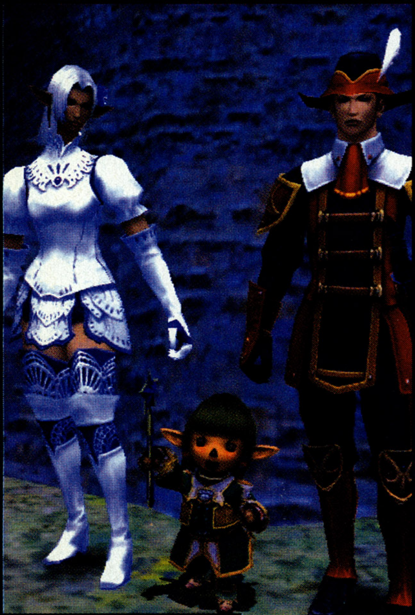
→ The whole month hasn't been about getting hitched, though. Now that Milkman and various Roundabouts have hit the upper regions of the leveling stratosphere, they've been able to take on the majority of the avatar prime battles for the summoner job (except for übersummon Fenrir) and win. Garuda and Ramuh proved challenging, cutting down a couple Roundies in the process, but Titan, Ifrit, and Leviathan went down with little problem. This month also rang in the seasonal quest, Summerfest, in which players could obtain a traditional Japanese summer kimono called a Yukata. The scene to the left shows Gatecrasher and the quest-giving moogle in Bastok surrounded by the throngs, while the lovely Gouryella models her Lady's Yukata at right.

Official wedding jingle: "You Can't Get What You Want (Till You Know What You Want)" by Joe Jackson

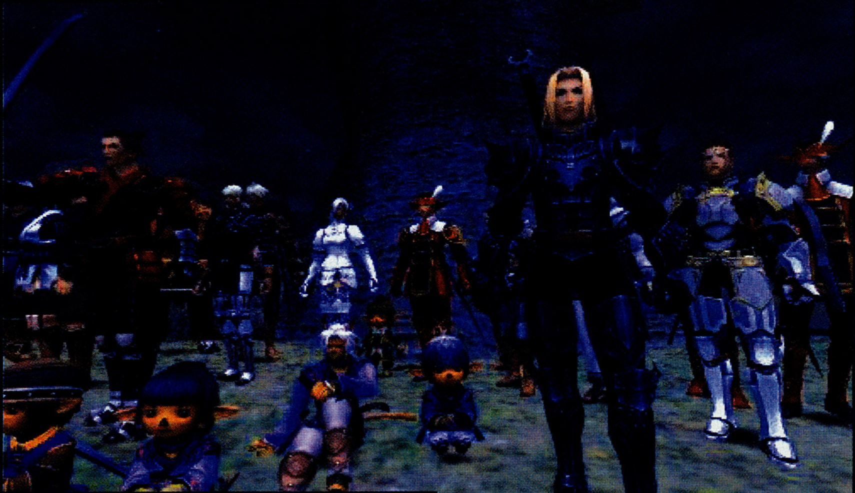




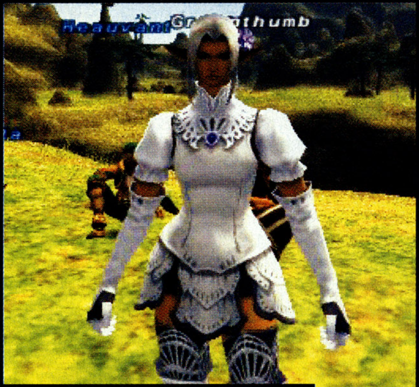
→ In what may very well be the most celebrated wedding to take place on Siren, even the GMs made appearances to pay their respects to the new couple. The GM to the left, Kastalen, has a special GM-specific suit of intimidating red armor that gives off a cool heat-shimmer. Above, the newlyweds prepare to reenact a scene from the movie *From Here to Eternity* on the beaches of Buburimu Peninsula.



Suzulolo, the Wedding Master



The Roundabouts turn out in force for the wedding.



The bride gets this pristine white dress.

Wraeth
Milkman
Suzulolo

Gyogi. THF/MNK. Level 25. Rank 5. She'll knock you out. Every time. Kitty's got claws.

MY LIFE IN VANA'DIEL

A MONTHLY TRAVELOGUE OF ONE EDITOR'S TIME IN FINAL FANTASY XI

MILKMAN

RED MAGE/NINJA

MAIN JOB LEVEL: **64**
SUBJOB LEVEL: **17**
NATION: **WINDURST**
RACE: **HUME**
SERVER: **SIREN**
LINKSHELL: **ROUNDABOUTS**

Sagittarius X-XIII
26
Milkman
Wraeth
Flannelman

Spiny Spipi
Gyogi

→ Gyogi takes on some of *FFXI*'s lower-level Nightmares, like Spiny Spipi (above) and that cheap-ass jerk, HooMjuu the Torrent (below), who refuses, no matter how many times she kills him, to drop the Monster Signa Milky so desperately needs to level his bard with authori-tay. Great.

Yagudo Abbot
Darain
Milkman
Holymis

Jetteseraph
Milkman
Flannelman
Koenigstiger
Wraeth
Barrett

HooMjuu the Torrent
Gyogi

"Drop the Signa, jerk bird!"

Pennylane
Jetteseraph
Spicol
Milkman
Zira

Wraeth
Milkman
Wuur the Sandcomber
Jeru

For almost a year now, I've documented my rise through the ranks of *FFXI*, so I thought it was time to list the things—to be fair—I hate about the game.

1) Jerk-ass players. Taking your aggressions out on the *FFXI* populace is garbage. Arguing with noobs in Shout just because you're level 75 is pretty weak, and once everyone's level 75, then what? Players named after Hobbit sidekicks = weak. Players who think conversing in Shout is funny = weak. People who threaten and train aggressive mobs to harass other people's parties = weak. You may be hot stuff when you turn on your PS2, but what about when you leave the house?

2) No-droppin' NM mobs. I realize now that Square has rigged my account to never let a cool item drop off an NM so that I keep playing and waste hundreds of real-life hours trying to get the item I desperately want to level my bard with: a Monster Signa. I never get drops, no matter what NMs I camp, and I don't camp them to sell items back at an exorbitant rate like some people do. I only hunt what I plan on using. Square 113, Milkman 0. You win, I lose.

3) People who do NOTHING but camp the same NM 24-7. Hey, how you spend your time eating up your monthly fee is up to you, but it's pretty lame to see the same players just camping the same crap every day of the week.

4) Deleveling. Most online games, from *Diablo II* to *EverQuest,* feature some sort of experience loss. But they've all gotten rid of the "feature" that causes players to lose a level due to an untimely death. I think it's really a slap in the face, considering there are so many factors working against you to begin with. There should be a delevel cap that prevents you from dropping a level. Experience points lost, OK. Delevel? No.

5) Eagle Eye Shot misses! What the hell? How can a ranger's two-hour move miss? Imagine if a paladin's Invincible didn't work, or if a dragoon couldn't summon his wyvern? Square needs to fix this, pronto.

6) Gilfarmers. A recent influx of no-skill-havin' players from Asia (they wear stupid equipment, rarely have a linkshell, and have names like Zoaws, Zoehm, Zoacms, etc.) have invaded *FFXI* to kill everything in sight and sell the gil online. *FFXI* is the new Asian sweatshop, and this creates a false economy that is bad for every player buying something at the auction house. Don't make me mention the fish-bots.

That said, I hope Square does something about this stuff because plenty of players are noticing these things. And with games like *World of WarCraft* on the horizon, they can't afford to ignore us.

_James Mielke

Fill in your own funny fine print. It's the multiplayer game everyone is playing! Also: Milkman is not in the mood.

MY LIFE IN VANA'DIEL

A MONTHLY TRAVELOGUE OF ONE EDITOR'S TIME IN FINAL FANTASY XI

MILKMAN

BARD/WHITE MAGE

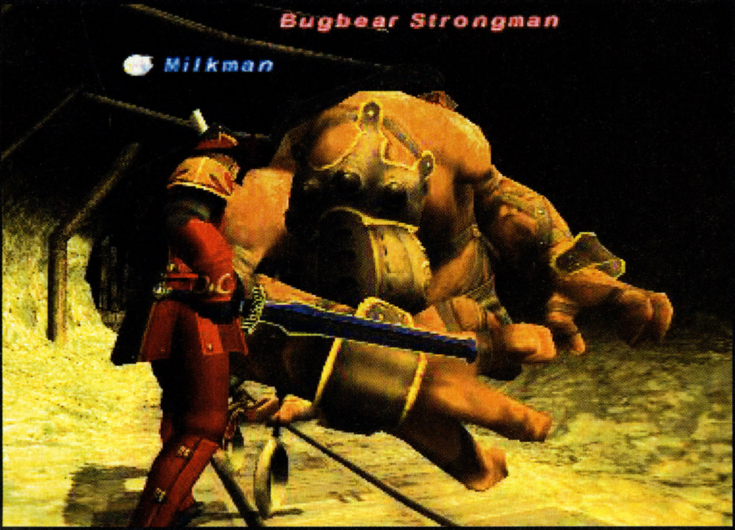
MAIN JOB LEVEL: **48**
SUBJOB LEVEL: **24**
NATION: **WINDURST**
RACE: **HUME**
SERVER: **SIREN**
LINKSHELL: **ROUNDABOUTS**

The theme of the month was "Promathia"—as in *Chains of Promathia*—the new expansion pack for *FFXI*. First I took a short run into Lower Delkfutt's Tower to trigger the events that would inaugurate me into the world of Promathia. After a brief, but intriguing cut-scene, I set off to explore Vana'diel's newly added areas.

The first place I visited was the Sunset Docks in Bibiki Bay. This oceany new spot off of Buburimu Peninsula is home to all sorts of new creatures and enemies, which range from Too Weak to Incredibly Tough to my level 64 red mage. According to word of mouth, level 71-74 players can level up here, fighting the moblin martialists (among others) found in this area, meaning that I won't be bringing my static to level here for a little while yet. A quest for the Attohwa Chasm map begins in Port Windurst and sends you to Purgonorgo Isle, where you must fight six NM level black mandragoras (called peerifools). It took me about 10 minutes to solo all six of the mandies, but I was able to do it with little danger to myself. After talking to the taru back in Port Windurst, I set off for Boneyard Gully, which is accessed via Attohwa, and after circumnavigating many antlions, I 1) found the gully, 2) watched a cool cut-scene, and 3) got the map all in one go.

I also took a trip to Oldton Movalpolos, where I found a flood of Japanese players farming moblinweave threads to turn into moblinweave cloth. A quest I had started outside of the restaurant in Port Bastok (talk to the taru) sent me into Oldton to find a "friendly" moblin. A moblin there asked me to find him four pinches of hoary old bomb ash, which I soon liberated off of some ancient bombs, for which the moblin gave me a key item that I returned to the taru. Oldton is something of a maze, though, and it's easy to get lost. Lower-level players should be careful there. In some areas of Movalpolos, the mobs rank as Too Easy to me, but in the blink of an eye, they can turn into Incredibly Toughs a mere zone away. I learned this the hard way when I trotted in front of a bugbear strongman, which turned out to be a Nightmare mob. Not only did I end up having to solo the strongman, but a couple of linking moblins who thought kicking my ass would be fun, as well. Wrong! After slapping on a little Stoneskin, Phalanx, and Blink, I Enthundered and cast Shock Spikes and pummeled the trio into the ground. OK, so it took me a while, but I won. Unfortunately, the strongman only gave me 16 experience points and 36 crappy gil (gee, what a surprise). Still, I hit level 38 as white mage this month and can now teleport around Vana'diel with ease.

_James Mielke



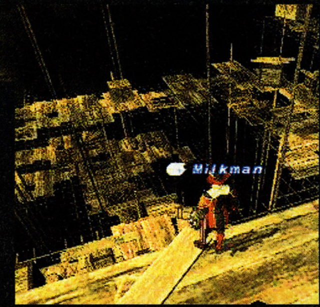
Milkman
Flannelman
Elexia
Sajhiri
Wraeth
Jeru

Milkman's alliance prepping for Promyvion-Dem battle

→ In a furious all-day marathon in Yhoator Jungle, Gyogi jumped from level 26 to 30 (thanks, Kyushu!), enabling her to complete the ninja job quest. A few dead korroloka leeches and a trip to Norg later, and our feisty mithra was off to Windurst to stab Rarabs with her newly acquired kunai (ninja dagger), shooting up to level 10 and unlocking the dual-wield ability as a ninja.

Leviathan
Gyogi
Goblin Smithy
Wraeth
Kyushu

Gyogi
Korroloka Leech
Korroloka Leech
Wraeth



Currently kicking it on the Milkman's iPod: "No, I Don't Know Her" Jay & The Americans, "Call Me Mellow" Tears for Fears, "Confessions Pt. 2" Usher

MY LIFE IN VANA'DIEL

A MONTHLY TRAVELOGUE OF ONE EDITOR'S TIME IN FINAL FANTASY XI

GYOGI

THIEF/NINJA

MAIN JOB LEVEL: **32**
SUBJOB LEVEL: **16**
NATION: **WINDURST**
RACE: **MITHRA**
SERVER: **SIREN**
LINKSHELL: **ROUNDABOUTS**

Kikai
Wraeth
Hon

Kikai rocking the Pumpkin Head II

What a busy month! And it's all about the ladies. Sure, Milkman stayed busy, grabbing a shaman's cloak off of Centurio X-I in the Quicksand Caves, leveling his Black Mage job (and learning Warp), and moving his Red Mage up a notch or two, but that's kid stuff. This month's spotlight belongs to Gyogi and Kikai, the THF/NIN and WAR/MNK, respectively, who have spent the past few weeks leveling up.

Gyogi (Japanese for "behavior"), for a level 30 Mithra, has nearly as much fame as Milkman in the three nations. While not quite Hero level, she's getting there. After a few hours in the Maze of Shakhrami, she got her Ninja subjob up to level 16, which supports her Thief main at 32. The best part is she now has Utsusemi, which creates shadow images for enemies to flail at, while she pounds away at them with her parrying knife and Mithran scimitar. Since the effectiveness of a Thief's SATA move (Sneak Attack, Trick Attack) is reliant on dexterity, I pimped her out in the best Dex-enhancing gear I could get my hands on. She has an emperor hairpin (Dex+3, Agi+3, Evasion+10), a spike necklace (Str+3, Dex+3), a balance ring (Dex+2), winged boots (Dex+3, Agi+3), and some noct hose+1 (which adds Dex+2). Her Mithran scimitar also adds Dex+3, which brings her grand Dexterity total—at the modest THF level of 32—to 64 (including equipment). The end result of all this tweaking is that when she pulls off a SATA on some unsuspecting mob, the mob gets hurrrrrt. A high Dex rating also helps the Thief Steal job ability, and a nice stack of silver beastcoins helps keep Gyogi supplied with the Shihei powder required to use Utsusemi. With the help of Flannelman (DRK), Jeru (WHM), Honna (DRG), Alderon (RDM), and others, Gyogi also collected all four pieces of her Mithran race-specific equipment. These folks and others, like the ever-present Wraeth, accompanied Gyogi on her advanced job quests for Samurai and Dragoon. While she will no doubt stick with the THF/NIN combo into her 70s, it's always nice to have other jobs to dabble in when leveling becomes a grind.

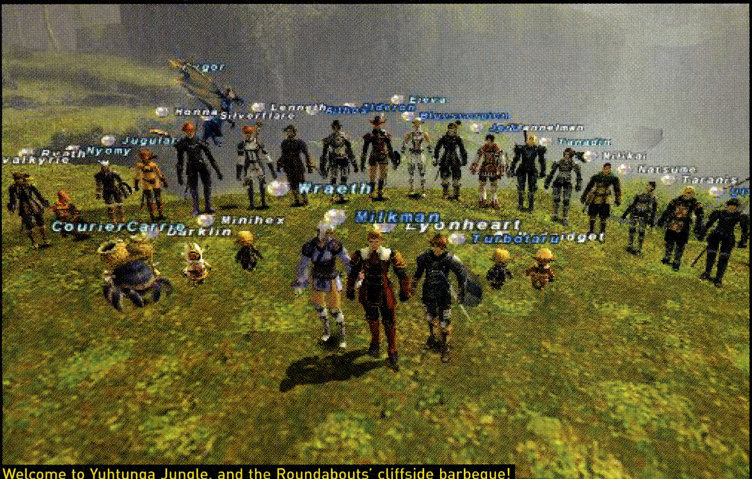
My Warrior, Kikai (Japanese for "machine"), had been languishing on the fringes of a chocobo license for way too long, so I formed a small party and went into the maze. Well, she entered at level 18 and came out at level 20. But it didn't stop there. The party (comprised mostly of Roundabouts leveling lower-level jobs) was so effective that they decided to move to Quifim and fight crabs and worms. That proved such a success that everyone kept going right on into Lower Delkfutt's Tower, charging through dozens of goblins and bringing Kikai's Warrior job up to level 25, gaining her the abilities Berserk and Defender in the process. With her Monk subjob, Kikai also gained the job trait "Counter," which occasionally gives Warriors an extra attack while blocking an enemy's advance. This comes in handy when she's using larger weapons (great swords, great axes, scythes) with big delays between swings. Since those weapons also prevent the use of a shield, any extra defense helps. Since her ultimate destiny is to march through Vana'diel as an übertank, in particular a Paladin, I'm keeping her weapon skills maxed in nearly every category. This way she'll be versatile enough to contribute to skillchains in practically any group configuration she finds herself in.

This month also marked the first anniversary of the Roundabouts, the linkshell Lyonheart and I started a year ago. Thanks for following our adventures, and please look forward to our continuing efforts.

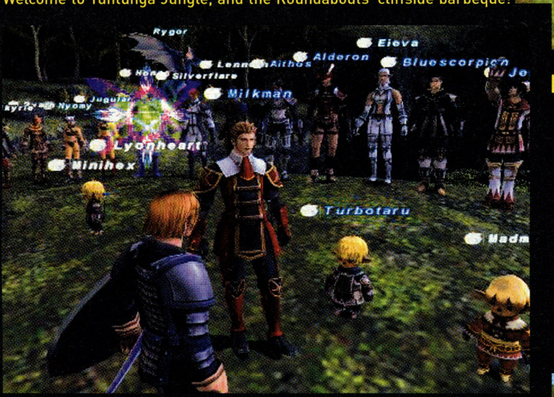
_James Mielke

Gyogi
Nyomy

→ Above, Gyogi uses Tonko: Ichi to render herself invisible to aggressive mobs. At left, Kitty and assorted Roundies kill the NM treant needed to complete her Samurai quest. Right, Kikai uses her new chocobo license to bolt across the plains of Vana'diel, grabbing teleport gate crystals and the keys to Kazham. Chirp!


Rygor
Lenneth
Aithos
Alderon
Eieva
Honna
Silverflare
Bluescorpion
Jugular
Rvath
Nyomy
Valkyrie
Wraeth
CourierCarrie
Minihex
Darklin
Milkman
Lyonheart
Turbotaru
Taranis

Welcome to Yuhtunga Jungle, and the Roundabouts' cliffside barbeque!

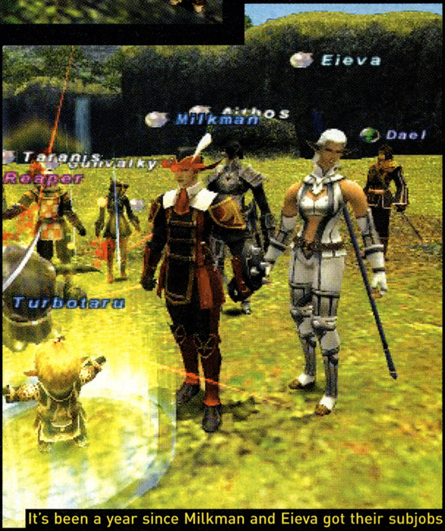

Rygor
Eieva
Alderon
Bluescorpion
Silverflare
Milkman
Nyomy
Jugular
Lyonheart
Minihex
Turbotaru

→ Above, the Roundabouts pose for the camera, celebrating their first anniversary in the lush, quiet, and scenic setting of Yuhtunga Jungle. Meat chiefkabobs and Yagudo drinks were served after. Milkman and Lyonheart (left) reminisce about the days when the Roundabouts consisted of only the pair of them. Below, Milkman reunites with Eieva, alongside whom he fought ghouls in the Valkurm Dunes for a magicked skull (one of the key items needed for a subjob) almost a year ago to the day. It's always fun to see the veterans on active duty.

Taranis
Milkman
Dael
Madmidget

Bluescorpion
Milkman
Taranis
Turbotaru
Madmidget

→ Top, Milkman organizes the troops for the group pic while waiting for the fog to clear. Bottom, the Roundabouts' resident munchkins take their positions up front in preparation for the big shoot.


Eieva
Aithos
Milkman
Dael
Taranis
Reaper
Turbotaru

It's been a year since Milkman and Eieva got their subjobs

KICKIN' IT LIVE, 1-TIME!

On October 30, 2004, Square Enix hosted a Halloween party in San Francisco to celebrate the one-year anniversary of the North American launch of *Final Fantasy XI*. Over 500 people wearing all manner of *Final Fantasy*–related costumes (Red Mages were the most prevalent. Word.) packed Jillian's nightclub, as none other than the Milkman rocked the house with an eclectic blend of thumping breakbeats mixed with familiar songs from Square's library of games ("Dash De Chocobo" from *FFXI*, Utada Hikaru's "Hikari" from *Kingdom Hearts*, and "Eyes On Me" from *FFVIII* were among the highlights). Attendees participated in special Ballista matches, while the top 10 cosplayers vied for the event's top prize—a pimped-out Voodoo gaming PC. Everyone left a winner though, as generous gift bags were handed out at the end of the four-hour event. Thanks, everyone!

Good kitty

MY LIFE IN VANA'DIEL

A MONTHLY TRAVELOGUE OF ONE EDITOR'S TIME IN FINAL FANTASY XI

Ayaa
Milkman
Wraeth

The Roundabouts take a breather while leveling in Bibiki Bay.

Milkman
Honna
Milikai
Bugaboo
Roelon
Ayaa

→ The Roundies make short work of Monastic Cavern resident NM, Bugaboo, who was the last stop between Milkman and his Bard AF3 body armor.

Tonberry's Elemental
Honna
Roelon
Ayaa
Milikai
Crimson-toothed Pawberry

Carrion Worm

Kikai

Carrion Worm

Paladin

MILKMAN

RED MAGE/WHITE MAGE

MAIN JOB LEVEL: 68
SUBJOB LEVEL: 34
NATION: WINDURST
RACE: HUME
SERVER: SIREN
LINKSHELL: ROUNDABOUTS

This month has meant three things: Carbuncle Mitts, Opo-opo Crown, and Bard Artifact gear. Here's how this exhausting process went.

Carbuncle Mitts, which only summoners can equip (at level 20), have a defense rating of 5 and add 14 MP, but have an undocumented benefit of reducing Carbuncle perpetuation cost by -4 MP. This means that the MP drain of having Carbuncle out is reduced significantly, which makes it a great piece of gear. Getting it, however, is a different matter. To pop the NM monster, the Crimson-toothed Pawberry, you must first get Offerings of Uggalepih, which spawns only once every two hours in the Temple of Uggalepih. This is very tough, as the area is filled with aggressive tonberries (who will dump a ton of ancient magic on you) and giant dolls, who aggro to magic (making casting invisible especially tricky). Once I had the Offerings, though, I took my two-party alliance to the specific spot and popped the NM. Faster than anyone could see, the tonberry whipped out his own Carbuncle, which then cast Searing Light, one-shotting our white mage Sentinal out of existence and taking me down below 300 HP even though I had on all the best RDM buffs money could buy. Still, once the alliance descended on the NM, the fight was soon over, and I was up one pair of Carbuncle Mitts.

The Opo-opo Crown is a major piece of gear that is especially valuable to Bards (my second primary job). While the basic stats are nice, when a pamama is eaten while wearing it, the crown gives the added bonus of +14 Charisma, which offsets its normal -7 CHR. Plus, it adds +50HP and +50MP when the fruit is eaten. The tricky part in getting this crown is it requires 10 offerings to various opo-opos found wandering around Kazham. Some of the items are common ones that can be purchased at the AH (workbench, blackened frog, etc.), but others, like the wyvern skull, can only be gotten by killing Hurricane Wyverns in Ifrit's Cauldron. But thanks to the persistent help of 75WAR friend Ayaa, 75WHM Jyneefur, and our very own Roundabouts, I was able to get the last, most difficult items and walk away with the distinctive crown.

My biggest satisfaction, though, came from hitting level 52 as Bard, and with Ayaa, Wraeth, Flannelman, Milikai, Roelon, Honna, and other friends in tow, getting all of my Choral artifact gear. Now all I have to do is find the time to level up and fit myself into it. Good times. Good friends. Good enough.

_James Mielke

This month, Milkman gets busy taking his ass to level 70, so that he can face the ultimate test: The Red Mage one-on-one battle versus Maat. Damn.